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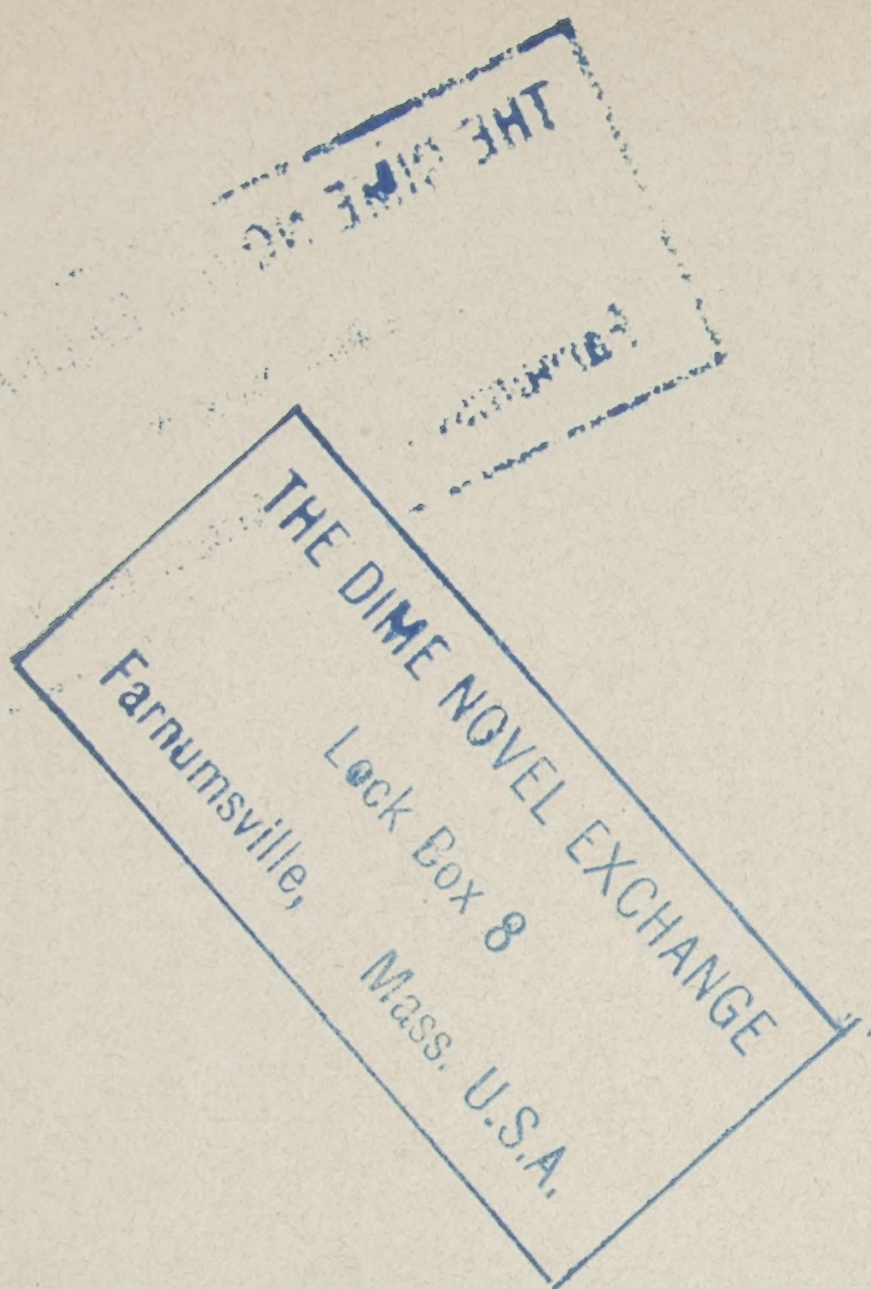


## A BLOW FOR THE SERVICE

OR  
HOW FARADAY WON PROMOTION.

BY ENSIGN CLARKE FITCH, U.S.N.

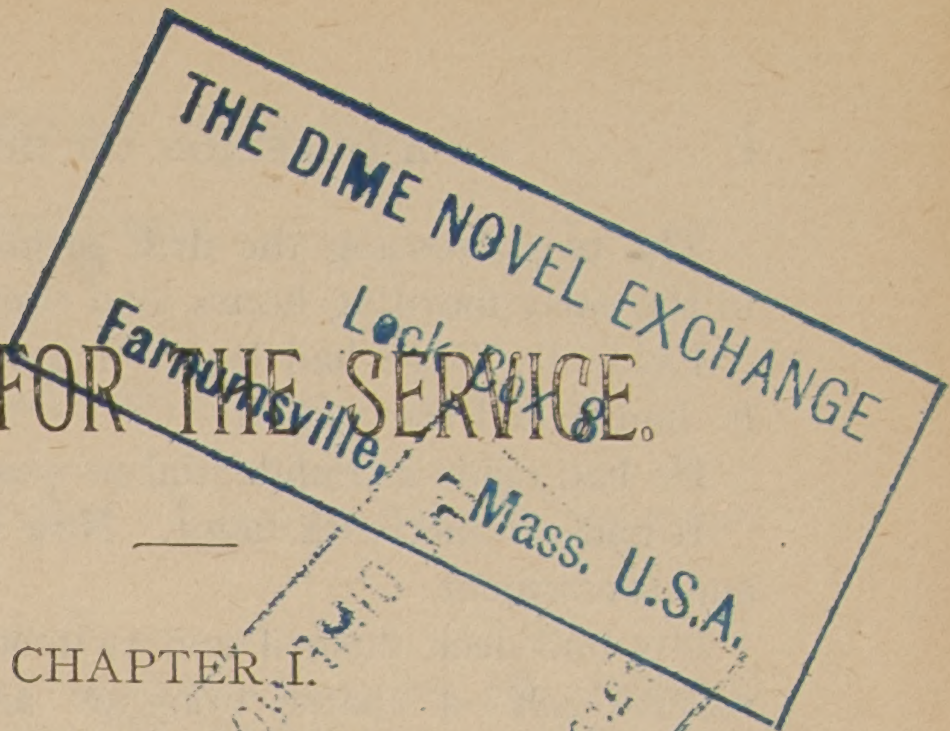




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# A BLOW FOR THE SERVICE.



## CHAPTER I.

### A QUESTION OF HONOR.

"Then it's war to the knife?"

"Don't be tragic!"

"And to the bitter end!"

"Now that is ridiculous!"

The one fairly hissed out the words, his tough and hardened face aglow with the deepest rage.

He was Gage, of First Class, Annapolis Naval Academy.

The other rigid and impassive as a statue, arms folded, ears attentive, was the most superb specimen of the plebe that had ever trod shoe leather in that famous institution.

Clif Faraday.

Never a twinkle of the eye or movement of the hand showed a flutter in the iron spirit trained in a school of coldest steel experience.

Clif calmly faced the bristling, panting fellow nearly double his size and weight, and five years his senior.

Gage was Clif's superior by roll-call measure, but infinitely his inferior in those things that go to make up the true cadet.

He knew this and it galled him, and he tried to scare Clif. Then he fumed and fretted because he could not cow this nervy favorite who had never yet been bullied down.



The two, crossing the drill grounds towards quarters in the early morning hours, had come together.

Evidently Gage had been on the lookout for Clif, for he had hailed him eagerly.

He had made a confidential proposition.

It had not met with favor. Now he showed his malice and resentment.

His bull-neck flushed and twitched and he looked his natural self—a coarse braggart and bruiser who had forced half his way through life with his domineering spirit.

"You reject my proposition, do you?" he demanded, glowering.

"Decidedly," nodded Clif.

"You won't help a fellow-plebe?"

"I won't spoil a fellow plebe."

"Do you call that chummy?"

"No—only principle," a trifle satirically retorted Clif. "I've got some, it seems. Maybe only a little, so I don't want to let go of it!"

"You won't do what I ask?"

"I wouldn't for my own brother—for the best friend I ever knew."

"You're loyal, you are!" sneered Gage. "See here, Faraday," he immediately supplemented, changing tone and tactics and trying to be persuasive and coaxing, "it's a small thing."

"Then why press it?"

"But it means a good deal to my cousin."

"He can't hope to win out?"

"I don't expect it—I just want him to make a showing."

"Gage," said Clif bluntly, "there's a way for him to do it."



"Is there?" muttered Gage.

"Yes."

"I'd like to see it!"

"The call for the examination is on at two o'clock."

"What of it?"

"Find your cousin now. Let him come to my room with me."

"What good is that?"

"I will put in every minute of the time till afternoon posting him, going over the studies. Isn't that a fair proposition?"

"It don't suit me."

"I will consider no other."

"You won't help my cousin out?"

"Not your way—he must stand on his merits."

"Then I'll find a way to reach you!" almost shouted Gage. "Faraday!" he hissed, shaking from head to foot with passion, "I'm a bad man to cross!"

"They tell me that."

"You've crossed me!"

"Sorry, but——"

"And I'll hunt up a chance to spoil you for this insolence."

"You can't bribe my honor."

"Bah! Fudge! I'll pay you off!"

"In fair coin? Go ahead. In spite and trickery? It won't pass. I'll meet you!"

"You'll rue this day!"

"I'm not worrying."

"I'll shake you off your high perch—see if I don't!"

"Try it!"

Away swung Gage. Clif proceeded towards quarters, a rare, splendid model of cadet imperturbability, decision



and nattiness, in the crisp freshness of the bright, new day.

He had met and overthrown one of those numerous temptations—or rather annoyances—that troubled every upright cadet.

Clif had knocked it out at one blow—just as he had tackled and vanquished obstacles, difficulties and Spaniards when in active naval service during the brief but decisive siege of Santiago.

Gage had a cousin in Clif's class—an idle, crabbed, envious fellow who wanted to go through the academy course as if it were a mere matter of form.

That afternoon twelve of the class were to contest in an examination on skill in model gunnery.

The highest average was awarded with an official squad appointment—a promise, a step towards future real promotion.

Gage's cousin stood about as much show of winning out as the colored janitor did.

Gage's own supreme will power, however, had undertaken to rush him through, anyway.

Clif, it seemed, would sit directly behind Gage's cousin in the examination room. The questions were to be distributed on slips of paper.

The contestants were allowed an hour to write out the answers to these.

Gage had suggested that Clif sneak over to his cousin two-thirds of his own answers—sure to be correct.

This would allow the cousin to make a tolerable showing—much needed to bolster up his general term record.

As has been seen, Clif had refused. It was dishonest. It would start the idler on a basis of fraud, deception and incapability.



For once, bully Gage had found his boasted "pull" a fiction.

No wonder he was mad—and as he strode away he shook his fist at Clif.

Then he kicked viciously at two benches tipped to keep off possible rain, to give bent to the fire and fury consuming him.

"Gorey!" came gasping and hollow from under them as they trembled and nearly toppled over.

Nanny, smallest plebe in the academy, slid half out from their shelter.

Nanny, who swore by Clif and cottoned to Clif as if he were some big brother, immediately crept clear back again.

The night previous the little fellow had sneaked a bag of apples into the grounds.

He had not been able to pass the lynx-eyed guard patrolling in front of dormitory quarters, however.

Nanny had concealed his goodies, had lain awake since five, had come out before seven to transfer the bag he had hidden under the benches to the private larder of "the set" in his own room.

While securing his contraband supplies he had noted the meeting between Clif and Gage.

Nanny had heard most of what had been said—had forgotten all about the apples in the ardent hope of "a scrap."

The prospect had faded—Nanny emerged as Gage passed the benches.

Nanny dodged back under, however, as Gage paused.

The latter was mean enough, Nanny voted, to give him away, apples and all, if he discovered what he was up to.

So, without meaning to play the eavesdropper, Nanny was forced to witness the development of another sec-



tion in the plots and plans of the baffled but determined Gage.

The latter had abruptly stopped. He sang out a sharp, challenging

"Hi!"

Nanny, peering, saw who was hailed. The cousin Gage was trying to force to the front loped up in his usual snuffling way.

"Want me?" he questioned, taking a parting puff at a cigarette he had been surreptitiously "enjoying."

"Of course I want you!" whanged the irate senior. "And a nice muddle I'm in about you."

"How?"

"I reckon I'll have to toss you! No use holding up a numbskull. What did you ever enter this examination for—it was a special, and no need exposing your ignorance?"

"I had to enter something, or exit entire!" muttered the cousin.

"Oh, you had? Well, how do you expect to make a show?"

"I don't. Haven't you said you could fix it so I might pull through creditably?"

"Well, I've missed," gritted Gage. "Oh, that Faraday!"

"You've tried him?"

"And—failed."

"I could have told you that."

"High sense of honor! Principle—curse him! I'm at my wits' end!"

Gage paced disturbedly up and down, his hands in his pockets; his cousin humbly watched him and waited for his next outburst.



"I hate to be beat. Oh, if I could get in a dig at that Faraday!" growled the irate promenader.

He paced for a long time, and he reflected for a long time.

Nanny maintained not the most uncomfortable position in the world, and began to get cramped and feel bored.

Suddenly Gage halted in front of his cousin with a somewhat elated face.

"I'll pull you through," he announced.

"Will you?" nodded his cousin eagerly. "I'm glad."

"It's no easy work. It may not work. But I think it will work."

"I hope so."

"The examination is to come off in the room the surgery corps used to occupy as a demonstrating room, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"I've an idea."

"Good!"

"I've two of them."

"Capital!"

The cousin looked admiringly at the speaker's bigness and cuteness.

"Help you—trip Faraday. Glory!" clacked the senior, "I'd be willing to lose a year to do that! What time? Oh, plenty. See here—do as I say."

"You say!"

"Can you get a hammer?"

"Easy."

"And a long, thin nail?"

"Easier still."

"And a chisel?"

"All of them."

"Do it, then."



"All right."

"Don't let anybody see you."

"Not a soul!"

"And do it quick, and meet me soon."

"That, too—where?"

"At the door of the examination room—inside of five minutes."

"I'm good as there!"

The twain moved off. Nanny came out from under cover.

He stroked his chin meditatively as he started after the two retreating forms.

He rubbed his head in a dubious, puzzled way as he gave way to the crowding thoughts that the overheard conversation had suggested.

"This is getting interesting; this is 'worth shadowing,' as Fishcake calls it," he murmured raptly. "Gage said he had two ideas. They hinge on helping his cousin, on tripping Clif, eh? This is my business. His first idea is a hammer and a nail and a chisel, is it? There's a plunky touch to that I can't let go of! What will his second idea take in the way of tools, I wonder? A crow-bar, an anchor and a derrick! I'm going to find out what kind of carpenter work Mr. Senior Gage is up to!"

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## CHAPTER II.

### "PLAYING IT MEAN."

Nanny was small, but spry. In an inconsequential, monkey-like way he managed to hover around the meeting place of the cousins without attracting attention.

Clif had gone off cool as a cucumber; that had clamped his dignified decision regarding the approaching examination ordeal.

Gage, fire in his eye, was working out "two ideas!" The diminutive plebe was bound to learn their trend and motive.

Nanny soon had actions and progress to guide him.



In a very few moments the two conspirators met at the door of the examination room.

It was unlocked. They passed in, leaving it half ajar. Stealthily, silently, Nanny hovered at its threshold.

"Well, got them?" questioned Gage.

His cousin produced in turn a hammer, a nail and a chisel.

"Good! give me the chisel."

"What am I to do with the hammer and nail?" interrogated his cousin in his usual blank, mawkish way.

"I'll show you. Now, then, where do you sit?"

"Here," was answered, the speaker placing his hand on the chair screwed down behind a desk.

"Sure of that?"

"Oh, yes. I'll make it sure."

"Be sure you don't make it a miss!"

"I'll look to that."

"Get out of my way."

Gage knelt, and scanned and felt directly under the chair.

The floor was old and had been much used.

"Here's a good crack," he said.

"Crack for what?" maundered his cousin.

"For my purpose."

"Oh!"

"See my finger?"

"Yes."

"Put your nail there. Set it square and drive it straight. No more noise than you can help," hurried Gage, with a quick shoot of his eyes towards the door.

"It's sprung, and only soft dirt and dust in the crack."

"Hammer."

There was a hollow tapping.

"Driven?" questioned Gage, who had arisen to his feet.

"Clear to the head."

"That's all right, then. Give me the hammer. You stay here till I come back. Kick with your foot if any one comes in, and slide out."

"And if they don't?"

"Await my return."

"Say, what are you up to, anyhow?"



"I'll finish first, and tell you afterwards," answered Gage laconically, and hurried from the room.

Nanny did not follow—he had suspicions, but as he saw Gage coming he slipped down the entry and into a kind of sentry-box closet placed there.

He could not keep track of both cousins at once, and as Gage had promised to come back, Nanny fancied he was best in safe hiding for the present.

There were vague, dull, tapping sounds in the examination room, the door of which had been closed.

Nanny thought furiously. He had got to a point where he could stand ignorance and inactivity just about thirty seconds longer, when Gage reappeared.

He was flushed and breathless. He went into the examination room.

He was busy fumbling about the floor under the desk, but only for a few moments.

Then he came out, followed by his cousin, with a satisfied look.

"Fixed!"

"Is it?" wondered his companion.

"Yes, and for keeps."

"Wish I knew what you've fixed."

"You!"

"Oh!"

"And if you don't help me fix somebody else in turn, I'll never do a thing for you again."

"Who, now?"

"Faraday!"

"Why, I'd be glad! If he was out of the class there'd be some show for—for honest fellows! He's that—that meddling!"

"Smart, he means," breathed Nanny. "They can't go him—that breed. No wonder!"

"Now, I'll explain to you."

With these words the two conspirators left the place—conspirators Nanny certainly knew them to be.

He came out of covert and he peered past the front after them.

They were engaged in animated but cautious converse, out of all earshot, isolated at quite a distance, and Nanny



knew that he could not stalk them to any decided purpose.

"Gage is telling," he ruminated, "I'm not going to catch what. Never mind! I think a great think—I guess a big guess!"

Soon the twain got through with their confab. As they parted and disappeared, Nanny left shelter.

He went straight around to the rear of the building. It had a kind of a cellar. Steps led down to it.

Nanny descended, and keenly surmised from footprints on the unused stairs that some one had just preceded him.

"Here is where Gage came," he soliloquized. "What for?"

Nanny closed the door and stood still till his glance became somewhat accustomed to the semi-darkness of the place.

Then his keen little eyes got a clear focus on things about him.

The first object he scrutinized with suspicion was an empty box that had been dragged out from a heap.

"Just about under the place where that nail was driven!" speculated Nanny.

He got up on the box, noticing that quite a litter of newly shaved and splintered wood covered it.

Nanny had to tiptoe to reach the reverse floor surface overhead.

A slight glint of light guided his fingers, just as that driven nail, now removed, had recently guided other fingers. Nanny was assured.

"It's clear as mud pies!" announced the plebe. "Gage has cleared the crack so it won't show particularly up stairs. He has cut, dug out. This is pretty dark business—and rich! Why, it's rich enough to work! I'm going to work it."

Nanny got down. He stood still thinking for a minute or two.

Then he began to smile. From smiling he got to chuckling.

He broke into a wild laugh finally and slapped his knee in a rollicking way.



"Idea number one, Mr. Bully Gage," he gloated, "No good! We'll have to block it, and serve you right!"

Nanny had guessed the senior's scheme. He left the cellar full of it.

He made instant for Clif's room.

"Glad he's out!" he declared, as he found only Vic Rollins there. "On second thought, better not let Clif know till it's all over. But there are those!"

There were those, indeed, who would gloat, glory over what he had to tell, who would glut their love of mischief, frolic, fun, to the uttermost!

Sinister as a modern council of ten, heads together, eyes dancing, breathless, eager, animated, Nanny, Fishcake, Pun'kin, Trolley the Jap, Dismal Joy, hobnobbed in a sequestered corner of the gymnasium, where the little plebe had hunted up his familiars.

A general directing a campaign could not have been prouder, more fussy and consequential than Captain Nanny.

As to his fellows and followers, their eagerness betokened that they were ready to break their necks to be part and parcel of "the commission" which Nanny delicately designated they were to constitute.

"Educational!" snuffled Pun'kin, holding his fat sides.

"Strictly so!" vouchsafed Fishcake solemnly.

"We will promulgate a new treatise on naval gunnery!" predicted Nanny in choking, muffled tones.

"We will keel over the chief examiner till he thinks he's struck a runic transcription!" convulsed Joy.

"If we only knew the questions that were to be asked?" suggested Trolley, languidly.

"We must be prepared with all kinds of literary ammunition," observed Nanny.

"At two?" elated Pun'kin.

"At two!" nodded Nanny, with an ecstatic sparkle of his radiant eyes.

At two o'clock the august instructor and the twelve aspirants for promotion honors entered the examination room.

Clif led, and Gage's cousin tailed, and the door was locked, and the question strips were distributed.



At five minutes of two, into the cellar under the room there had stolen five cautious, scurrying cadets—Nanny and his adherents.

They instantly dove for the shelter afforded by boxes and other debris.

"When I give the signal," formulated Nanny, his head bobbing up from a barrel.

"Tackle!" suggested Fishcake.

"Noiselessly muzzle Chuck if he gets obstreperous!"

"Maybe he won't come!" fluttered Pun'kin.

"Bound to!" declared Nanny.

"S-st!" warned Fishcake.

Footsteps descended the outside cellar way. The door was pushed open.

Gage had entered the cellar. He closed the door to a crack, and peered and listened to ascertain if he had been fellowed or seen.

He pushed the door shut in a minute, and even shot its bolt.

Then he came over to where the box had been placed, and which Nanny had not disturbed.

Upon this he seated himself, his head thrown slightly back and upwards.

There were all kinds of vague sounds overhead: the directing tones of the instructor, the questioning ones of the cadets, rustling papers, the scratching of pens over paper surfaces.

Five pairs of eyes, fixed ardently from behind box, barrel, debris heap, noted Gage's every movement.

The senior finally gave a sigh of relief. Directly over his head sounds of shuffling feet echoed.

Then he had to rub one eye, upward-cocked, for a speck of dirt had landed in it.

A flitter followed. Through the crack Gage had cleared there came pushing, poking down, and then flying down, a folded sheet of paper.

With considerable satisfaction Gage unfolded this, holding it so that the light of a low window struck it.

Not yet did Nanny give the word, although his pulses were dancing, and Pun'kin near by was in a fever of desire and suspense.



A broad smile was wreathing Nanny's face as he noted a studious, half-worried expression on that of Gage, who was in plain view.

The latter had pushed back his cap on his head, and was regarding the sheet in his hand in no careless manner.

"Not so smart as he fancied!" chuckled Nanny. "Me-ow!"

That was the signal—a cat-call.

Wrestling with a puzzle, a problem, the senior barely noticed it.

Then he started aghast as he was pounced on, dragged back flat by many hands.

"Don't squawk!" warned Nanny, "mum, and it's only fun. Lisp, and it'll be tragedy!"

The great, powerful fellow comprehended the situation in a trice as his glance swept the faces of his five captors.

"Faraday's crowd!" he hissed.

"Faraday don't know a syllable about this," vouchsafed Fishcake.

"No, I'm responsible," confessed Nanny. "Got him?"

After one or two struggles Gage's arms had been secured, helpless and tied; his feet were an easy secondary matter.

Pun'kin had got the sheet of paper, dropped in the scuffle.

As Nanny had guessed, it was a copy of the questions given out overhead.

The cousin had made it hastily, had sent it down through the crack in the floor, as directed.

Gage's idea was to return it with the proper answers. His baffled expression had shown that, despite his advanced grade, this would have been no easy task.

Whether he would have succeeded or not was an open question, for he had no further opportunity afforded him.

He glared and writhed as he saw the elfish, glowing faces scan the screed, and divined that his indolent cousin was about to be taught the great necessary lesson of self-reliance.



"Question one," read pulsating Pun'kin in an eager whisper.

"Give it!" breathed Joy.

"What is the conical disposition of a projectile fused by electrical and frictional influences, when the curvature of delivery is based on the Maxim system?"

"Goshen!" mouthed Joy.

"They expect him—or this galoot—to answer that!" marveled Pun'kin.

"Write!" sounded the inexorable mandate of Nanny.

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### CHAPTER III.

#### SCIENCE GONE MAD.

The captive senior cadet uttered a groan—he winced like a victim on the torture rack.

"Write!" ordered Nanny.

"Go ahead," nodded Pun'kin, turning over the sheet of questions in his hand, and poising his pencil.

"Answer one: It produces what is known as a nux vomica condition of the polar biceps—hence, scads."

"Nanny—don't," abjured Trolley.

"Let her go! Give us the next."

"Who invented smokeless powder?"

"Sir John Swat of Pocasset, Michigan, who is supposed to have been Duke of the Hurons about the twelfth century," formulated Nanny.

"He'll never bite!" predicted Joy.

"Joy!" gloated Nanny, "you don't know the intricacies of the human mind! Number three?"

"In the Spanish navy, who ranks highest—the construction engineer or the master of ordnance?"

"Answer: The master of ordnance is the rankest."

"Say, this will make an awful flare!" warned Fishcake. Gage writhed in misery.

Question four was a sum. Of its answer Nanny made a mass of figures and signs that would have paralyzed Paknan.

There were typical themes on charges, on gun elevation,



on high explosives, on various technical minutiae of naval warfare.

Such a mad, crazy jumble as the plotting five made of it never entered the brain of mortal man before.

It was nerve-racking, sense-appalling mass of the preposterous, the incredible, the unique, that Fishcake finally folded up and slid through the crack in the floor.

Gage's last hope expired as he saw the slip of paper go into the hands awaiting it up stairs—he uttered a baby bellow.

"My! but he's hot over this!" observed Joy.

"Well, the temperature in his shoes probably is a degree or two over twenty below!" placidly retorted Nanny; "but he'll be hotter some day if he carries on his carpentering exploits!"

Gage was almost fuming at the mouth. He foresaw the future, and it pained him.

He was none too well liked, and while his cousin would contribute the crowning screed of imbecility to the examination record, his share in it—or rather lack of share—would make him famous.

"This," chuckled Fishcake, his face on a hideous grin, "is as absorbing as getting up a leading article on the cultivation of the soy bean as a good stock feed——"

"Begash!" writhed Nanny.

They sat in a solemn circle about their helpless captive for a full three-quarters of an hour.

Then shifting feet and talk overhead told them that their appalling deed had been consummated.

"Examination over!" announced Fishcake, getting up and stretching.

"Come on!" said Nanny.

They filed out, one by one.

In a pathetic and then in a grim way Gage gazed after them.

He did not speak a word. He felt that his ordeal was not yet passed.

He had "fagged" too many plebes in his time to stand on the mercy list, and he expected all kinds of diabolical tortures before the crowd was through with him.



The five posted themselves near the door through which Clif and the others trooped out ten minutes later.

"How did you do, Clif?" inquired Nanny.

"Pretty well, I think," answered the popular cadet.

"What kind of questions were they?" submitted Pun'-kin, with fat face bland and innocent.

"Oh, quite easy."

Nanny winked, and Trolley "bust"—went off in an apparent coughing fit.

"How did Gage's cousin do?" insinuated Fisncake gently.

"Why, he seemed quite pert and chipper," reported Clif. "I saw him hand in his paper with a smile too seraphic to be anything but the bliss of ignorance or the confidence of success."

Nanny was "laying" for Gage's cousin. He had to wait some time.

The fellow seemed delayed beyond all others, and, when he came out, was strangely interested in asking the instructor questions.

He accompanied the latter to his room—an unusual proceeding—and Nanny left the others to follow him.

Nanny caught him coming out, a mixed hopeful and a crafty look in his shifty eyes.

"Hey!" hailed Nanny. "I've something to tell you."

"Make it short!" glowered Gage's cousin.

"Hello—sort of snappy, ain't you?"

"Yes, 'hello!' Your crowd is meaner than dirt, and I don't want to train with any of you!"

"That so?"

"And it will be laid out—soon!"

"That so, too? Well," said Nanny, "that's all right, but I wanted to tell you that your cousin is anxious to see you."

"My cousin?" repeated the plebe, with a suspicious start.

"Yes, you'll find him in the cellar——"

"What!"

"Under the examination room."

"Say——"

"He'll tell you!"



Nanny did not wait to view the touching meeting likely to take place between plebe and senior.

He bolted for Clif's room. Sounds of laughter greeted him as he neared it, and he burst in indignantly.

Fishcake had just finished telling of the cellar episode.

"Shame on you!" flared Nanny.

"Heydey!" coaxed Fishcake.

"Yes—run like a white head to be in at the fun, and no good! Ought to have left a little for me to tell Clif."

"There is this left to tell, Nanny," placated Clif, a trifle serious; "Gage is our deadly enemy henceforth."

"He's always been that."

"And when the instructors look over that mess of modern science you five have coughed up——"

"Why!" blurted Nanny. "Gage can explain. "If," qualified the little plebe significantly, "he can afford to do it."

Clif experienced some few qualms over the day's proceedings.

He never liked to make an enemy, and, despicable as Gage was, he would have preferred to have kept him on the neutral list.

Outside of rather regretting Nanny's exploit, however, Clif felt pretty comfortable.

He believed he had scored in the examination, and it meant another upward step on the ladder.

Clif was free from duty for the rest of the day—the others, on account of these "specials" in examinations, were likewise foot loose.

The Gage story got bruited about in a sort of confidential way among certain of the cadets, but its main victim did not dally "to get the laugh."

Gage had made himself scarce. One senior told Clif he had gone to the city, to find an outside second, as he was determined to resign, challenge each one of the chummy set in turn, and kill them off in regular rotation.

At all events, they did not run across the baffled senior during a two hours' exercise bout on the campus.

Strolling townwards about five o'clock, however, just as the sextette turned into Maryland avenue, Clif ran on his fate, it seemed.



Around a corner came two persons. One was Gage, and the rival promenading parties almost collided face to face.

Gage halted—a dark scowl wreathed his features.

His companion, for some inexplicable reason, whirled like a top, and, sidling to the curb, evinced a marked uneasy awkwardness.

Gage's fighting blood was up. He doubled his fists and he strode up to Clif.

"Faraday!" he breathed, his voice, in a sharp tremor, "if you're a man——"

"Hold hard, there!" clanged out Fishcake's keen drawl. "A man! Do you dispute it? Why, you mountebank thimble-rigger——"

Fishcake had jumped in front of the bully, and he balked him like a locomotive pushing an empty freight car.

The others grabbed him, but the moral effect of Fishcake's long, menacing swing was palpable on Gage.

"This don't end with six on one!" he threatened hotly.

"Make it one to two, if nothing's the matter with your friend!" piped Nanny cheerfully.

The "friend" was really acting alarmed. He kept his face averted. He seemed on the point of running away.

"That's all right—that's all right!" wagged and bobbed and nodded the senior incoherently. "Wait, Mr. Clif Faraday—wait!"

"How long?" submitted Pun'kin in a doleful, patient tone.

"You won't be in such high spirits to-morrow!" predicted the venomous senior.

"So?" smiled Clif.

"You blocked my cousin—look to your own fences!"

"Do you own some fences, Clif?" asked Trolley.

"They're down! you're beat! you're N. G.! you're squelched!" almost shrieked Gage.

There was some hidden meaning to all this—Nanny traced it first, Nanny tried to make the vandal commit himself.

But Gage, thinking he had said enough, glided to the



side of the person he had accompanied, and seized his arm with a sharp, nettled:

"Come on!"

The other dragged back, but with a swift movement Gage chanced to turn him clear around.

"Hah!"

Forced from him, a vivid interjection left Clif Faraday's lips.

A flame, sudden, piercing, scathing, shot from his eyes towards the stranger companion of the senior.

That stranger shrank like a whipped cur. He dared a single look at Clif—his glance fell, he positively shivered.

He was dark-featured as a peon. There was to face, at ire and manner a foreign dash that was unmistakable—Spanish, clear-cut and tell-tale.

"Hasten!" he hoarsely uttered, urging his companion.

"Stop!" cried Clif Faraday.

He seized Gage's arm to detain. The latter tried to shake off his grasp.

"Stop, I tell you!" repeated Clif, and never had his boon comrades seen that fine, expressive face so stern, so cold, so earnest. "Mr. Gage, you may be unaware of it, but this fellow——"

"My friend!" cried Gage, resenting Clif's designation.

"Ah!" said Clif with deep meaning. "He is your friend? That bars even charitable intervention, then! Your friend? You pick worthy models, truly! Friend of Gage!" railed Clif, fixing a full glance upon that individual, "I believe we have met before?"

"N-never!" dissented the other, but he chattered:

"I think we have."

"A—a mistake!" came the muffled, dubious reply.

"On the flagship of Admiral Sampson" pronounced Clif.

"No, no!"

"Off Santiago!"

"I—I was never there!"

"Yes!" shouted Clif. "You, Gage, listen to me! That is your friend? Be proud of him, for to you and to the public, whenever and wherever I meet him, I shall brand him as what he is——"



"Faraday, this is insult!"

"Take it as you choose—that man is a thief——"

"Take care!"

"A traitor——"

"I demand——"

"A sneak, a spy, and an assassin!"

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## CHAPTER IV.

### DENOUNCED!

There was a tragic hush.

Clif's ringing words had echoed out like a defiance to battle.

In him devoted Nanny saw the friend, the chum, even the cadet fade vaguely, and the *man* in Clif Faraday asserted itself.

"Stop this!" appealed Nanny, fairly affrighted.

"Faraday, you're cutting your own throat!" fluttered Fishcake, seizing Clif's arm, rigidly pointing at the person he denounced.

The faithful fellow traced a serious outcome from the present confrontation.

Gage would never dare to outstep institution restrictions beyond mere blows, and in this Clif was his equal, but this stranger—certainly Clif was taking a big risk in thus publicly affronting him.

Fire flashed from the senior's eye.

"Faraday," he quavered, "you have insulted my friend!"

"No, only unmasked him!" disputed Clif.

"I shall have blood for this!" shouted Gage, and he was truly valiant for the moment.

"As much and as soon as you like!" retorted Clif steadily.

"You stand to your words?"

"Every syllable, only adding!" went on Clif incisively, "that I will horsewhip this miscreant, this cur, if I ever come face to face with him again in Annapolis!"

"Clif!" remonstrated Nanny.



"He'll kill you for this!" palpitated fearful Trolley.

"Him!"

All looked at the person whom Clif annihilated with a glance.

If he was not what Clif had claimed, he was at least a craven, a meek-spirited churl.

His tawny face was twitching, and his beringed fingers were atremble.

His fright or weakness—whichever it was—seemed truly pitiable.

Then he sought to spur up.

"I shall have satisfaction!" he tried to brag out, and his hand significantly swept towards his hip.

"Draw!" jeered Clif, not at all himself, for, so bitter, so aggressive, none of them had ever seen him before.

"What is it, you Spanish dog, a phial of poison?"

The fellow cringed as though struck with a lash.

"Or the firebrand of the incendiary?"

"They will assassinate—they seek to draw me into a quarrel!" whimpered the cowardly wretch. "My friend, withdraw, I beseech of you."

"Faraday!" cried Gage, "you shall answer to me for this!"

Clif stood like rock. Never quite thus had his friends seen the bulldog trait displayed in him.

The Spaniard urged Gage away more in a flight than a retreat, and bolted, with a frightened backward look, the first corner reached.

Then, and then only, did Clif relax from a pose grim, rigid as that of an avenger of doom.

"I don't like this!" muttered Fishcake.

"Pretty high theatricals!" breathed Pun'kin.

"Theatricals!" cut in Clif, very much stirred up, and showing it. "Fellows, this is a serious thing! Where did Gage ever pick up with that wretch? A cadet his company! Oh, it is a reproach to the academy!"

"Who is he, Clif?" questioned Nanny.

"Quesada."

"And who is Quesada?"

"I will answer in a word," explained Clif, still stern and nerved up. "When I last saw that man he was land-



ed from the admiral's flagship, whither he had been taken as a prisoner. He boasted that he had burned up forty convalescent Spaniards in a hospital craft. He is the man who poisoned the water supply of one of Cervera's ships. He dared to claim a reward from the admiral for his horrible inhumanity."

"And?" insinuated Fishcake.

"Was marched ashore, and lashed with leathern thongs down a double file of two hundred marines. That was Sampson's answer!"

No more questions were asked. It seemed whenever Clif spoke of his brief Cuban career that he occupied a certain dignified plane that the others could not reach, and it lessened for the time being the chummy familiarity that made cadet life enjoyable.

They returned to the academy quite subdued and silent, breaking up at once.

Fishcake repaired to his room. There was a sombre look on Clif's face he did not like.

Clif's outspoken censure of the Spaniard was likely to arouse the treacherous spirit of Quesada, if not any war-like spirit.

Clif was just the fellow, too, to carry out his threat of driving this detested monster from Annapolis as he would a plague.

Gage's association with the vandal was a disturbing element.

The senior was so mad and revengeful at present that he might be induced to play into Quesada's hands in a way that would be troublesome, possibly perilous, to nervy, dauntless Clif.

Fishcake had been about an hour in his room when Pun'kin came in.

What was unusual for him, he sat down quite placid, but he made such mournful eyes at his lank host that Fishcake looked up from his book quite savagely at last.

"Hey, you fatness!" he observed jarringly, "what you mooning over?"

"Me?" filled up Pun'kin. "Say, Fishcake—I'm almost crying!"

"What about?"



"Things are going wrong."

"What do you mean by wrong?"

"Against Faraday."

Fishcake got up and wriggled uneasily.

"Say, those two infernal snapping turtles we met to-day!" he began in a roar.

"No, no!—subside, subside!" soothed Pun'kin. "I don't know anything about them."

"What is it, then?"

"Report on examination just bulletined."

"Early as this?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"It's Darby first."

"What!"

"Meresole second."

"Never!"

"Jones third, Patton fourth."

"Why!" cried Fishcake, "Where does Faraday come in?"

"Fishcake," faltered Pun'kin dolefully, "he don't come in at all!"

"Impossible!"

"He hasn't even got a place."

"Incredible!"

"He's missed, he's failed, and—it will break his heart!"

Fishcake felt his head go whirling. Clif was by far the best scholar in the class.

His confident expression on leaving the examination room had settled the matter that he was head and ears above all competitors, in Fishcake's estimation.

There was a ghostlike lull of silence. Fishcake looked mad and Pun'kin sniffled.

"Want you to tell him," finally spoke the latter.

"What?" flared Fishcake.

"Break it to him gently."

"No, *sir!*"

"It'll be worse, if he gets the news in a crowd."

"Get out—get out, yourself!" shouted Fishcake. "Do I run a hospital, a sympathy bureau? Get out—I won't be bothered! I've troubles of my own!"



"I'll go!" mourned Pun'kin. "One thing first, though?"

"Speak it!" gritted Fishcake, half crazy over Clif's misfortune, and trying to play hard-hearted.

"He did not miss."

"But you just said he did!"

"I know, but—skullduggery."

"Oh?"

"Gage boasted that he had a rod in pickle for Clif."

"Ha!"

"You heard him—I heard him. Don't you see? Gage bribed the instructor—the academy is going to pieces!"

Off paddled Pun'kin, at the point of desperation and tears.

"Hum!" muttered Fishcake.

He stood staring at nothing, alone, but thinking volumes.

There was hope in Pun'kin's hint. "Skullduggery?" Yes, Gage's cousin had solicitously attended the instructor to his room, Gage himself had prophesied what no one could have known—Clif's downfall—unless crooked work was going on and within his knowledge.

"Not bribed the instructor, though," wagged Fishcake convincingly; "they don't do such things here. Then what? Clif will guess. Yes, I'll go and break the news to Clif."

But Clif was missing from his room; nobody about the grounds had seen him, either.

As Fishcake was returning to his room Joy just passed through the gates.

"I say!" hailed Fishcake. "I'm looking for Faraday."

"Gone—an hour ago."

"Where?"

"City."

"What for?"

"I guess—following that Spaniard."

Fishcake looked solemn.

"Have you seen Nanny?" he asked.

"Yes—he's gone to the city, too."

"What took him?"

"Confidentially, I think—following Faraday."

Fishcake looked serious.



## CHAPTER V.

## FISHCAKE, THE AVENGER!

Tap!

"Come in!" said Fishcake.

It was two hours after dark—hours that the lank plebe had pretended to put in at study.

In reality, he had been bothering himself about Clif Faraday, and he hoped that the summons announced some word or token from the absent plebe.

But it did not. Timorously the door opened, gingerly two strange intruders shuffled into the room.

Fishcake stared.

One was a spare, typical Irishman.

In vivid contrast, his companion stood outlined an unmistakable emigrant of the Dutch-Dutchy.

Their clothing was in the last stages of dissolution—the Irishman looked thirsty, and the German hungry.

They had evidently received a hustling reception from the cadets they had met in exploring their way hither, for the Irishman edged into the room looking flustered, and the German gathered up his coat tails and shut the door as if fearful some one might reach after and grab him.

"Mishter—" began the Irishman.

"Fishballs," nodded the German.

"Hooks," corrected the other.

"Go ahead," encouraged Fishcake, passing over the faulty nomenclature.

"We were sint," said the Irishman, "by a cadet."

"Dot!" differed his comrade, "und dot cadet was Nannygoats."

"Bismarck, be explicit!" abjured the other, "it was plain Nanny!"

"I understand," said Fishcake, rousing up. "What does Nanny want?"

"A docther, I'm thinking, be jabers!" gravely replied the Irishman.



"Yaw, dot horsepistol!" acceded his partner.

Fishcake became anxious.

"He's hurted," proceeded the Irishman. "Won oi."

"What do you mean?" inquired Fishcake.

"No—von eyses!" proudly corrected the other. "He was plugged."

"Basted, och hone!" added the Milesian. "We found him and we cared for him. He's sint for you and he said——"

Fishcake rattled out a handful of coin. He pressed a quarter on either.

"Now," he directed, "the shortest way and the quickest—take me to Nanny."

Fishcake hurried on his cap and led the way into the corridor.

He tried the doors of several rooms as he passed them, but their usual occupants were out.

It was "free night" for the institution, and the cadets were enjoying it, and Fishcake had no time to hunt for his friends.

Some remarks were made by a few joking loungers as Fishcake started for the gates.

An allusion was ventured concerning "the new German ambassador;" another to the effect that Fishcake's uncle "had come over from the ould sod."

But the lank plebe's mind was on business bent. Nanny had sent for him and was "hurted."

How much, he could not very clearly glean from the dialectic incoherency of his two guides, and he gave up trying to find out.

They led him over a mile and a half. When they stopped it was in a poor quarter of the town and before a miserable junk shop.

"Dot was dose," announced the German.

"Yes, there we left him, dead or dying, asthore!" added the Irishman.

But Nanny was very much alive. Very impatiently seated on a coil of old rope, Fishcake found him in the poorly lighted place.

"Well, young one?" propounded Fishcake, very much relieved to find the little fellow alive and kicking, al-



though he had a broad bandage completely covering one eye and a part of his face.

"Well!" retorted Nanny. "Why didn't you hurry?"

"I did, all I could. What's up? What's under that bandage?"

"Piece of raw beefsteak."

"And under that?"

"It *was* an eye once."

"And now?"

"Don't know—pretty deep mourning it feels."

"Been scrapping, eh?"

"Not I!" dissented Nanny with vigor. "Here's the lay-out. I was hunting for Clif."

"Why?"

"Because I saw it working on him to get after that Spaniard who worked him up so."

"Did you find him?" questioned Fishcake.

"I did not, but I ran across the Spaniard."

"With Gage?"

"No—alone."

"Where?"

"Near here, and that's why I staid here, and I won't leave the neighborhood till I run the miscreant down!" announced Nanny with spirit. "See, here Fishcake, I was walking around casually, when I fronted right into him."

"Sure it was him?"

"Sure as salt! He had been drinking. I don't think he knew me. But he played me a low-down Spanish trick on general principles. 'One of the cadet cattle!' he hissed as he saw my uniform. 'Caramba!' he cursed as he saw I was small—and he fetched me a clip."

Fishcake's arms began to work spasmodically as if he had the rickets.

"I went kiting. It was a fearful blow. I think he had something in his hand."

"A brick!" suggested the Irishman.

"A wooden shoes!" insisted Bismarck.

"Anyway, for two minutes I lay in the gutter, knowing nothing. These gentlemen picked me up. They carried me here. I sent for you and the crowd."



"What for?"

"To clean out that greaser."

"Oh, you know where he is?"

"Oi do!" said the Irishman promptly. "I saw where he put."

"I couldn't bring the crowd," explained Fishcake.

"Then we must do it alone."

"Tare an' 'cuns—with my aid!" declared the Irishman uproariously, drawing and flourishing a short shillalah.

"Und dis!" said Bismarck, pulling from a pocket a piece of sausage about a foot long.

It was hard as a rock, and it was a question which of the two weapons would prove the most effective.

"Acushla dheelish!" waved the Irishman, "folly the blackthorn!"

"I am vorse varm as me yourself!" spurted the German.

The Irishman jumped up, cracking his heels and ready for a ruction.

The ambitious German, fat and clumsy, tried to imitate his example.

There was a gyrating tangle of his limbs, and he came flat like a house falling.

"Bhe dhe husth, ye Toork!" roared the Irishman. "Be contint with playing the hivy artillery. Oi'll lade the van!"

Fishcake paid but slight attention to this animated by-play.

His liberality had given them two stalwart supporters, but he requested only that the Irishman show him where the Spaniard had gone.

"We will attend to the rest," he announced.

Fishcake's fighting blood was roused. Little Nanny was the pet of the crowd. A cadet had been assaulted in a cowardly manner. Fishcake rolled up his coat cuffs as they passed along.

"There ye are!" said the Irishman at last.

He had paused in front of a low drinking shop attached to a kind of boarding house.

"You saw the man who knocked down my friend go in here, did you?" queried Fishcake.

"I did, and—there he is!"



Both were peering through the glass top of the side entrance door.

Fishcake's breath quickened. There, sure enough, was the miscreant whom Clif Faraday had so bitterly denounced that day.

He was standing at the bar, singing some kind of a song to three loungers whom he had been treating.

The fat, foreign-faced landlord behind the bar was blandly nodding and smiling on his good customer.

Quesada "owned the place," quite. Full of strong drink, and buying more, he was allowed to "rule the roost."

In a remote dark corner sat a man muffled up in an enveloping rain coat, apparently asleep.

Fishcake turned to Nanny.

"He is in there," he said. "Shall I call him out?"

"No!" answered Nanny, grittily; "we'll wade in!"

"Sorr!" said the Irishman, putting out a detaining hand as Fishcake touched the knob of the door, "we have our roights."

"What are you getting at?" asked Fishcake in some surprise.

"If we moight be allowed to exercise an appaling to the judgments of the friends of that Spanyard in case they tuk a hand."

"We shan't forget your good intentions," smiled Fishcake, "but we cadets wipe out an insult personally, unless the aggressor is a giant and stands behind a cannon!"

"I belave ye! Still, as a resarve loight artillerv we shall bring up the pontoons when the crisis permits!" winked the spoiling-for-a-fight Milesian.

Fishcake opened the door—Nanny pressed into the place beside him.

The uproarious crowd at the bar did not notice them.

"By the nape of his neck!" formulated Fishcake in a whisper, "down to his knees! Apology!"

"And then?" insinuated Nanny.

"As he is a greaser——"

"Yes?"

"As he can't understand the real American way——"

"Go ahead!"



"Kick him! After that I'll sling him around the walls a few times. Then we'll see a doctor about your eye."

"Never mind my eye," fluttered the martial-souled Nanny; "*he'll* need the doctor!"

The Spaniard was roaring out the end of his song. The cadets did not understand its import, for it was in Spanish.

However, a word here and there convinced Fishcake that it was some grandiloquent anthem on the glory of Spain.

As he wound it up and the besotted crowd applauded, the flushed and braggart Don started to light his cigar.

Lifting the match, he seemed to espy for the first time crossed on the chandelier over his head an American and a Cuban flag.

There his glance rested for a minute, and a hissing aspiration left his lips.

The Irishman and the German had stolen in after the cadets.

Bismarck had proceeded at once to the little lunch counter a few feet from the bar proper. There he was cramming the free food outspread into his gaping jaws.

The Irishman hovered at Fishcake's side, his mouth probably watering at the sight of the glasses at the bar.

His eye sparkled, however, and his fists doubled as Fishcake's stern eye, Nanny's fluttering impetuosity, told him that a riot would soon reward his patience.

"Sorr," he whispered ardently, "give the worrud!"

"See here!" shouted Quesada, "the rag!"

He had lifted the match—not to light his cigar.

Instead, applying it to the drooping end of the little American banner, he ignited it.

"He has set fire to The Flag!" shouted Nanny.

Up in the corner of the room, coming to his feet with a slam, sprang the coat-huddled figure.

Fishcake thrilled and made a jump.

"Fag a raghara lums!" roared the Irishman, "I'll have his heart's blood!"

"Chiminy!" blared Bismarck.

He was the heaviest, the clumsiest, yet the quickest of all gathered there.



He had sprang forward, had met the craven reptile who had insulted the flag with a weapon fully fitted to him.

That rock-hard foot of sausage rose—fell.

With a frightful hiss and a cutting welt it slashed down across the face of the shrinking vandal.

"Dot!" screamed the infuriated German, full of free lunch, but full of patriotism and sentiment, too, it seemed, "dot for Vaterland und dot Sthars and Sthripes!"

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## CHAPTER VI.

### "THE MAN FROM THE MAINE."

"Pwhere's he gone to?"

The Irishman roared out the shout, frenzied at not having been able to take an active hand in the scrimmage.

For the Spaniard *was* gone.

That unique assault of the German had floored the miscreant who had burned the American flag.

As he fell—cut, shrieking, affrighted—in a flash everything seemed to whirl.

His three hangers-on made a rush for the rear door, and in doing so they tipped Bismarck flat.

They swept the advancing Fishcake and Nanny aside, and they barred the fervid rush of the shillalah-armed Hibernian.

Like a snake, and then as would a leopard, the wiry Spaniard had crawled and afterwards sprang.

He was lost in the distracting shuffle—evaporated, vanished.

"He was behind dose!" gasped the German, pointing.

His finger indicated the lunch counter, and he followed his finger.

In a collision meeting, Germany and Ireland went crashing against that little counter, and over it toppled.

Beneath there was a shriek, a rustling.

"We've caught the reptile!" jubilated the Irishman.

He sprang upon the flat surface now, penning in the fugitive as would a box set down over a mouse.



The German plumped down beside him. He looked proud, satisfied, as he glanced at the cadets as if for further orders.

But Fishcake and Nanny were busy with other matters just then.

The landlord had grabbed up a long billy from a shelf, and he swung it out as he ran out.

He narrowly missed Nanny's head, and he did land a sharp cut across Fishcake's knuckles.

"Sind I may never!" roared the Irishman, and leaped to the rescue.

"Drop that!" ordered a new, clear, ringing voice.

"Clif!" marveled Nanny.

"Why, are you here?" mouthed the lank plebe.

"Do you hear me?" continued Clif Faraday—he it was, the huddled pose in the corner chair magically changed, the enveloping coat thrown back.

The popular cadet had emerged from covert the minute that blazing flag set his own ardor on fire.

He had dropped his "disguise" as he discerned the belligerent tactics of the brawny landlord.

That individual's arm he now held powerless, and, his fingers pressing till the wrist bones cracked, he caused the fellow to drop his weapon.

"Don't you take sides!" he warned the shrinking boniface peremptorily; "we want that man!"

In the presence of three active, serious cadets and two capable civilian helpers, the landlord subsided—cowed.

The German was the happiest of the crowd. He sat squared across the counter, resuming a munching on some free lunch he had put in his pocket.

"I haf him—under!" he grinned.

"Let him up," ordered the Irishman.

"And we'll use him up!" muttered Nanny, his little fists doubling—his big damaged eye reminding him painfully.

Bismarck got off the counter. Clif tipped it, and the Irishman stood eager and longing, half stooping "to give the spalpane a tap," if the Spaniard made a rush.

But there was no rush, for there was no Spaniard.

"Dutchy!" roared the Irishman, staring, recoiling.

"Vat is dot?"



"Mishtake!"

"Vy?"

"You—ye cabbage!"

"I vill hits you mit de sissage!"

"Come off—yere cross-eyed—ye said he was oonder the counther?"

"I sawzed him dere go."

"Ye didn't!"

"Yes," interrupted Clif, "he did. And you tipped it over him, but—look!"

Clif threw the counter crashing clear back on its front.

The fugitive had been shut under it. From the lunch counter was an opening in the floor, heading narrow steps going down into the cellar kitchen where the lunch was prepared.

"Let me!" cried the ardent Milesian, waving his club.

He squeezed through the narrow opening through which, it seemed, things were handed up, not brought up.

"They call me a terrier!" he chuckled, disappearing. "I'll nose out the rat, if he's above ground!"

But in a minute or two that animated Celtic face came poking up into view again.

"No!" he reported.

"No—what?" insinuated Clif.

"No Grayser! reptile! Spanyol!"

"What's he doneded himself mit?" propounded Bismarck.

"Kitchen dure, yarrud, strate—an' agin! off agin! gone agin! Flannagin!" quoted the Celt aptly.

Bismarck uttered a doleful howl—Nanny a disappointed wail.

Fishcake looked mad. Clif proceeded straight up to the landlord.

This individual, big as he was, master of the domain as he was, had tumbled back against his counter shelf nursing his twisted wrist and regarding Clif with a kind of awe.

He had heard of cadet crowds cleaning out other crowds, and with time to think evidently decided that it would not pay him to fight the battles of even a good customer.



"What's become of that man—your friend?" flared Fishcake.

"He is not my friend," demurred the boniface.

"Isn't?"

"No—only a customer."

"Same thing."

"Not at all. He has gone—down the steps, through the kitchen."

"It isn't too late, maybe," spurred up Nanny. "Fishcake, let's search outside."

"All right."

Clif did not notice the defection of his chums. He faced the landlord in his cool, deliberate way that usually brought results.

"Who was that man?" he demanded.

"You saw!" submitted the other irritably.

"And you know!"

"No more than yourself."

"He has been here before?"

"Oh, yes; an occasional customer."

"How occasional?"

"Well, yesterday, day before."

"Then you must know something of him?"

"Suppose I do!" cried the man, "though I don't, I tell you. You have made a disturbance. You must leave here. Why should I be treated as if I am some criminal? I won't stand it!"

"Why?" coolly insinuated Clif. "I will tell you why, my man. Just let the public know that you sanctioned such things as a measly Don burning the American flag, and see what a wreck they would make of you and your place."

The landlord turned white as if his face was painted.

"So," proceeded Clif, "once more, who is that man?"

"I—I really can't tell you," insisted the other. "He comes in, he goes out. He spends money. I knew he was a Spaniard. I don't like Spaniards, but I have to serve the public. He never before acted as he did to-day."

"He lives near here?"

"He must, to come in so regularly."

"Where?"



The landlord looked candidly ignorant.

"You had better try and find out for me!" suggested Clif meaningly.

The landlord was now nervous, worried. He saw that he had put his foot in it.

It was one thing keeping a public house and giving customers free rein, but quite another sheltering, tacitly encouraging venomous enemies to insult the flag that protected him.

"Say, wait!" he said; "I'll do what I can," and he went to a rear door and called out.

A man—a helper about the place, he looked—shambled in, responding to the hail.

"What you want?" he propounded.

"You know the Spaniard who comes in here?"

"Oh, the fellow who brags about being a duke, or a prince?"

"Yes."

"Well—what?"

"Where does he put up?"

"Why, how should I know?"

Clif decided that he did not—Clif turned to abandon the line of useless investigation in hand and strike out independently on a new one.

"Wait, hold on!" detained the newcomer. "I'm thinking of something."

There was a speculative, musing look in his eyes.

It abruptly found expression.

"Tell you," he said, "I don't know where that bragging Don lives, but I do know where a great friend and crony of his lives."

"Maybe that will do," nodded Clif.

"I can show you—they were in here once together," resumed the man. "I've seen them together twice besides, on the street. I think they bunk together, but, as I say, I don't know certain."

"Direct me to the place," said Clif.

"I'd better show you—I can't just describe."

"All right."

The landlord looked relieved, believing he had purchased the cadet's favor.



He said:

"Who is it you mean?"

"Why, the Don's friend—the fellow he had in tow here yesterday."

"Oh, him!" exclaimed the landlord, suddenly remembering, apparently.

"Yes."

"You mean the man from the Maine."



## CHAPTER VII.

## A MEMORY OF THE NAVY.

Clif was greatly struck by that peculiar, that totally unexpected expression:

"The man from the Maine."

There had been a vivid, a fiery suggestiveness and revival of recent warlike memories when he had first faced Quesada, the Spaniard.

Now it was like an added whiff from Cuban shores—a breath from the battle fields, this allusion to an apparent character who like himself had been part and parcel of the grand old navy that had swept the Antilles of their Spanish pests and tyrants!

His attention was attracted, his interest aroused.

"Who is 'the man from the Maine?'" he asked.

"Why, that's who," nodded the landlord's helper.

"What is?"

"Just as it says—sailor, marine, who was with the ill-fated ship."

"How do you know?"

"The Don said so."

"Did he?"

"The man looks it—dress, battered up."

"And those two—train together?" suggested Clif incredulously, "a hero and a vampire!"

"Seems it."

"What does the sailor say?"

"Oh, he don't talk—sick. The Don sort of seems to lead him, care for him."

"He is probably a fraud," suggested Clif.

"No, he's got a thing on his breast."

"A thing?"

"Marks—ink tattoo of what you call it, I don't know.



But a fellow in here who is posted said it was all right—genuine article—he was from the Maine, right enough.”

Clif inferred that some mark the marine bore would be enlightening to a navy-bred expert.

He no more understood such a person hobnobbing willfully with Quesada, however, than oil mixing with water.

Clif turned to the Irishman—his comrade was making up for lost time at what of the lunch had not been spilled on the floor out of the dishes.

“You wait here and tell my friends to wait till I come back, will you?” asked Clif.

“Yis, sorr.”

“You please show me where this man from the Maine lives,” directed Clif to the landlord’s helper.

Clif had clear motives in view in what he was about.

He knew this Quesada to be a snake, a sneak, a man who, wherever he was, lived by treachery and bloodshed.

He deserved to be driven from any respectable community, and his being at Annapolis meant trouble for somebody.

When Clif had met him, all his righteous soul fired up on general principles.

When he came to think it over that the senior Gage was hand in glove with this vandal, it terrified him for the welfare of the cadet.

Such a reptile as Quesada was a menace to anybody, and he had formed Gage’s acquaintance for some sinister purpose.

Clif had, therefore, resolved to run down the twain. Antagonistic as Gage might feel at present, Clif believed that a little persuasion would convince him that he was handling pitch in chumming with Quesada.

As to Quesada himself, Clif resolved to learn what new deviltry he was up to—to expose him, drive him away from the city.

He had run down the Spaniard in the saloon to find him alone—Gage and he had parted company.

Clif had not seen the Spaniard assault Nanny. But Fishcake had just briefly told about it, and the little plebe’s condition showed—and here was a further incentive for burrowing out this vice-hardened miscreant.



The latest and newest complication—the reference to the man from the Maine—was the final urging influence that made Clif believe that in tracing the malignant Spaniard he was likely to find out more things than one.

"Here's the house," said Clif's pilot, after they had proceeded two squares.

It was an old-fashioned house, three stories high, and built in receding floors, presenting a kind of structural terrace as to front elevation.

"Very good!" nodded Clif, pressing a coin on the man.

"How I know, is I helped the Don up the stairs with the man from the Maine only yesterday."

"Oh!" intimated Clif, "is the sailor a cripple?"

"Not at all."

"Then——"

"Too much drink or too much dope—stupid and incapable, anyhow."

"Do you remember the floor?"

"Top—you go straight up."

"Room?"

"There's only one door up aloft there."

"Thanks."

"And I see a light, so some one must be there."

The street hallway had no door at all.

Clif drew out of the street, watching his guide retrace his steps in a plodding way that suggested all lack of treachery or deception.

Then the naval cadet began the ascent of the stairs, considering reflectively all that had just been told him.

Clif had a revolver in his pocket. Besides, the Spaniard had shown himself a physical coward, and Clif would have been perfectly willing to tackle him with bare fists.

"I will make short work of him," decided Clif. "He battered Nanny! I'll probe him, turn him over to Fishcake. He deserves a coat of tar! Let them decide."

As to the man from the Maine, Clif did not yet know what kind of a proposition he would be called on to handle in this respect.

Quick-witted for thinking, however, he half suspected that the sailor must be a dupe, a tool of Quesada, in some way.



"There may be two to fight, so I had better get the lay of the ground before I proceed," concluded Clif, three flights of stairs traversed, landing him at the door of an attic room.

There was light beyond—no keyhole, but it showed through a crack at the bottom of the door.

Clif could see no feet upon the floor, could hear no sounds of moving or conversing.

"All quiet in there," he soliloquized. "Door locked?"

He pressed the latch gently.

"No," he reported to himself.

It gave. Clif slowly looked and then stepped into the bare apartment.

It held a table, a lamp, chairs, a bed. Upon the bed lay a form huddled in bed clothes—heavy breathing droned out on the still air of the room.

Clif closed the door. He made sure of two things.

The person on the bed was in a sodden slumber.

The person in the bed was not Quesada.

This latter fact Clif surmised from a glimpse of a ligh tow-like head, not at all corresponding to the Spaniard' raven hair.

Clif took up the lamp. He proceeded to a door before him.

He opened it, peered into the second apartment of the suite.

No one occupied it, and it had no other outlet except small dormer windows letting out almost plumb with the roof.

Clif came back to the first apartment. He looked into a closet.

"Empty."

Clif peeped under the bed.

"No one there."

He found a bolt on the door and he shot it—its only guard.

Then Clif set the lamp down on the floor near the bed hoping, feeling that he was alone with the man from the Maine.

Clif got very close up to the bed. He leaned down his face to peer, and caught a whiff that enlightened.



"That fellow said drunk, dope—one guess hit it; doped he is, or a habitual," murmured Clif, detecting the unmistakable taint of some deadening drug.

Clif drew down the counterpane, and the movement did not disturb the sleeper—his slumber seemed much like a stupor.

A grizzled, drawn face was revealed—the service-hardened face of the average seaman.

It did not possess much intelligence. It was weak, dissipated looking.

The man was fully dressed except for his coat.

But his shirt was unbuttoned at the neck, and from the throat down his chest was thereby exposed.

Clif saw something that interested him. In blue indelible ink the man bore a tattoo reminder of naval service.

"That's genuine enough!" murmured Clif.

He instantly recognized the tracery-outlines of the far-famed pennant of the ill-fated Maine, sunk by the mines in Havana harbor.

The graceful "M" stood out plain and prominent, was not recent in its construction, and had been executed at the cost of considerable pain and time.

Clif seized the sleeper's arm. He had found the person described to him—that was sure.

This, further, was Quesada's companion, associate, tool, dupe, victim, as the case might be.

"I have got him, all to myself, and I am going to find out something!" determined Clif. "If Quesada comes here—why, he's locked out, that's all, unless I decide to trap him in."

It was with great difficulty that Clif succeeded in waking up the sailor.

It took him five minutes fully, and the manoeuvre was accomplished only by patience, roughness and pertinacity combined.

Half-awake, the fellow was incoherent, irrational, confused—fully awake, he was surprised, suspicious and alarmed.

He fixed his eyes quite wonderingly on Clif. He studied him in a puzzled way.

"What—what are you doing here?" he stammered.



"I am here on business," answered Clif promptly; "I want to talk with you, my man."

"What about—give me a drink. My throat is cracked to splitting!"

Clif went over to a table. There was a bottle of some dark liquid and a pitcher of water.

Clif tilted the latter to a glass to fill it.

"No, no—some of the other!" insisted the man on the bed.

"I reckon you have had quite enough of that," returned Clif; "you drink this."

He tendered it to the man. He was surprised that he did not take it, for he looked eagerly thirsty.

"Take it," he urged.

"Lift me up and pour it down."

"No—help yourself."

"Can't."

"Why can't you?"

Clif noticed the inert pose of arms and body—he suddenly swept clear away the counterpane.

Then the naval cadet saw why the man did not help himself.

Around his waist, holding his hands tightly pressed to his sides, was a buckling steel band.

Around his ankles pressed a second like secure contrivance.

The man from the Maine was a prisoner and helpless.



## CHAPTER VIII.

## DUPED!

"What is the meaning of this?" cried Clif in considerable surprise.

The recumbent sailor looked flustered at once.

"N-nothing!" he stammered, with an embarrassed flush; "I—I sleep this way—that's all."

"Force of habit?" insinuated Clif satirically, and entirely incredulous, and tracing something under the surface here—that puzzled him quite.

"Say! never you mind."

The sailor roused angrily all of a sudden.

"But I do mind," observed Clif.

"You get out——"

"Not yet awhile, I guess."

"Who told you to intrude here?" flared the other.

"Look you here, my man!" spoke Clif sternly, striking out a course of action and adopting its initial move promptly, "drink that water!"

He was a weak, vacillating fellow, this man from the Maine; for he wilted, his sudden emotion subsiding instantaneously under the spell of Clif's masterly manner.

He drained the glass feverishly. Then he looked a little sullen and suspicious, but Clif gave him no time to think or speak.

"You ask what I am doing here?" proceeded Clif energetically. "I'll tell you. I am looking for a Spaniard."

The sailor gave a great start.

"A Spaniard named Quesada."

The sailor gasped. Clif was striking home in some way—a dismaying way, it seemed.

"This man, Quesada," continued Clif, "is a spy, a traitor, a vampire! He has assaulted a naval cadet."

"And you're one of that kind," murmured the man, glancing uneasily over Clif's uniform.



"I am," answered Clif. "I am going to find Quesada. You know him. Don't get ready with a lie—you know him."

"I do," admitted the sailor anxiously, "and to my sorrow!" he mumbled half-audibly under his breath, but Clif caught the words.

"Whatever this wretch is up to—and he thrives on deeds of wickedness and violence," went on Clif, "he is a marked man in Annapolis, for I know him, and he shall not leave Annapolis till his plans are laid bare, rooted out, himself punished, if we can reach him."

Clif saw fear, fright, come into the eyes that studied him with rising emotion and interest.

"Now then," proceeded Clif, "what figure do you cut in this man's affairs?"

"Me?" mumbled the sailor; "nothing. I'm only a poor wreck—I've done nothing wrong."

"You will, though, if you continue to train with this man. See here, my friend," pursued Clif, "suppose you tell the truth? Are you in trouble, danger, temptation? Why not be frank with a comrade—I was in the navy."

The sailor's glance fell, his lip quivered.

"If you are what you pretend to be——" continued Clif.

"Who says I ain't?" cried the sailor. "Common seaman I am, but I was with the *Maine* until a month before she was blown up. I saw service clear through after that on the gunboat *Decatur*."

"And a man willing to risk his life for the sake of the glorious Stars and Stripes now trains with a wretch who an hour since burned them up with a curse in a moment of braggart recklessness revealing his true serpent nature!" cried Clif.

"What's that—what's that?" shouted the marine.

"He did. You listen."

Clif handled artfully the material he had to work on—Clif began to mold the sailor to his will.

Suddenly the man burst out—abruptly stirred by the cutting lash of conscience, influenced by a patriotism not yet dead though obscured by desperation, buoyed up by



the promise of Clif that he would find friends, and good ones, if he was what he claimed to be and told the truth, the sailor cast off the shackles of deception and degradation.

"Cadet," he gulped out, "you break me up!"

"I want to brace you up."

"I'm a—a——"

"An unfortunate man—in the clutches of a beast of prey!"

"It's so! it's so!" agonized the other. "You don't know! I'm a broken man, but I was brave once, true once!"

"You fought for Uncle Sam."

"I'd do it again. Give me a chance!" choked up the sailor. "Free me—say, cadet, free me! Take me with you! Hide me! Keep that man from me, and I'll tell you all. I'm sinned against!"

"I believe you."

"I want to escape him."

"Escape him? You shall defy him!" cried Clif, infusing the weak suppliant with courage, mightily satisfied with his success in getting the sailor to the point where he wanted him.

"Will you do it?" pulsed the now trembling, anxious man.

"Protect you? You shall see!" promised Clif.

"Then get Quesada!"

"How get him?"

"Go where he is—lock him up. I'll tell everything. Just let me see him where he can't reach me, and I'll tell everything!"

"But don't you see," suggested Clif, "I can hardly lock him up without a specific charge?"

"He burned the American flag!"

"Unfortunately that is not particularly punishable."

"Lynch him!"

"Hardly!" half smiled Clif. "No, my friend. Give me a tangible hold on this man—I'll do the rest."

Clif had slipped off the steel belts that held the sailor captive.



The latter tried to get up in bed, failed, sank back with a groan.

"See!" he moaned, "robbed of strength, sense, honor—everything! He's done me! Cadet, find him—oh, find him before he comes here and puts me again under his wicked spell, before he comes here and murders you He'd do it!"

"Oh, no!" retorted Clif confidently.

"He will! Surprise him, take him, cage him! Then hurry back here. I'll make a confession—I'll implicate him. Prison for life—nothing else. It's your chance, it's mine. Do it! do it! do it!"

The sailor was now completely exhausted by the reactionary influence of some drug he had taken and his vivid display of emotion.

Clif fixed a calculating eye upon him. The man had an important revelation to make, it was certain.

"Go!" he gasped, weakly, waving his hand.

"Where?" questioned Clif.

"To Quesada."

"Where is Quesada?"

"At his other room."

"But where is his other room?"

The sailor gasped out a rapid, intricate direction, but Clif caught its every syllable.

"You will not leave?" he stipulated.

"Can I, even?"

The sailor, indeed, looked helpless. The direction he had given was only a square distant.

Clif need not be out of sight of the building he was in all the way to Quesada's described rooms and back.

"I'll risk it!" he decided, gliding to the door, unbolting it, and hastening down the stairs.

His thoughts kept pace with his flying feet, once in the street.

He would find the Spaniard, secure him, march him back here, bind him, go for Fishcake and Nanny—delve into all the merits of the extraordinary and as yet completely mystifying case.



Clif located the building the sailor had indicated—the floor, the room.

Its door was open, the apartment revealing a recent hasty visit, a reckless abandonment.

"The bird has flown!" murmured Clif disappointedly; "whither?"

He did not speculate long. The one in the hand was safe, at least. Clif sped back to the old structure where he had left the sailor.

Clif was all breathless when he opened and closed the door of the attic room.

"He's all right—he hasn't tried to get away," soliloquized Clif, with complacency and satisfaction glancing toward the bed.

Things in the room appeared to be just as he had left them.

The form on the bed lay huddled up, and Clif advanced toward it.

"I could not find Quesada," he started.

There was a rustle and an arousing moan from the recumbent man.

Then the latter gasped faintly:

"Water!"

Clif turned to the table. This, before leaving, he had drawn up within reach of the sailor, only removing the bottle that apparently contained the drug he had been taking.

His back was thus momentarily presented to the invalid.

"We will leave here, you and I," said Clif, reaching for glass and pitcher, "and a thorough search will be made for this Spanish harpy——"

Thud!

A pound weight of lead seemed suddenly to strike the back of Clif Faraday's head.

Click!

A band of steel shot like a snake around his waist, enfolding his arms.

Clif staggered, reeled, plunged headlong.

He had a vision as he whirled of a gloating, murderou



face rising from the bed crowned with malice and triumph.

And the naval cadet distinctly heard the hissing, venomous words:

"Meddler! spy! the Spanish harpy has you in his toils!"



## CHAPTER IX.

## A TERRIBLE PREDICAMENT.

Clif fell on his face, half stunned, writhed, jerked at his arms, found them secure as if riveted.

"Duped!" he breathed hard and set his teeth and struggled to rise.

He had missed the wily Spaniard on his way to "the other room."

Quesada must have entered the present building by some rear entrance, for Clif had not seen him on the street.

What had transpired on his arrival Clif could only vaguely conjecture.

The Spaniard must have surmised from the freed condition of his victim that some outsider had been a visitor to the room.

Had the man from the Maine weakened and told all—had Quesada guessed?

At all events he had removed the real invalid from the bed, and had got into it himself.

He must have heard Clif coming, peered down the stairs, and prepared to receive him.

The very steel belt that Clif had removed from the arms of the captive had been utilized by the crafty Don to render the naval cadet helpless.

A slungshot had downed Clif, and now, feet only free, he was at the mercy of a man whom he knew would not spare him.

The first thing Quesada did was to run for the door.

He shot its bolt.

He directed one glare of murderous hate at Clif as the latter managed to stagger to his feet.

"You have interfered!" he hissed.

Quesada ran at a shelf, looked, groped—to another.

Clif traced in his movements the intention to find and



employ some weapon or missile with which to finish his half completed work.

Clif steadied, studied—then he shuddered.

With a snarl vicious and curdling his miscreant captor discovered what he was looking for.

He now held in his grasp a long-handled, heavy hammer.

He gripped it and posed his arm in a way suggesting that he was massing his strength for the longest reach, the most destructive stroke he could encompass.

As he squared about, hunching for a glide, a pounce, Clif gave the table a kick.

It hurtled up from the floor, and went spinning directly in the path of the on-rushing monster.

Amidships it took him. Quesada gasped and tripped back.

"To the death, then!" he roared, more madly infuriated than ever.

Clif backed. He was fighting on a forlorn chance, but it was in him to grittily go down with flying colors.

"Others will reach you!" he prophesied.

"Others, too, shall suffer!" snarled the Spaniard.

"Take it!"

Clif suddenly inserted his deft, nimble foot under the round of a chair.

It shot through the air, a whizzing projectile. The Spaniard dodged. It swept his hat flying—just grazed his temple.

Clif had now used up all available ammunition. He backed, kicked out a foot with a force that sent the door of the next front room crashing back till it shook the building.

He sprang over the threshold. The Spaniard followed. His terrible weapon uplifted, he made a sortie on his hampered foe.

Swing, swoop, hiss—missed.

Whir, whiz, slam—the great hammer dented the wall plaster deep, snapped a lath to fragments.

The wretch halted. He was afraid of those nimble feet. He was a coward, afraid to venture too near even a crippled victim.



Quesada drew a long, grim breath—he hurled the hammer.

It missed, struck the wall, fell at Clif's feet, and Clif sprang upon it.

"Noble fighter!" scoffed Clif irrepressibly.

"You shall die!" hissed the baffled, wrought-up miscreant.

"Hire some one to help you!"

"You jeer—wait!"

Through the doorway plunged the Spaniard. What for Clif did not know, but he guessed—some other weapon.

Clif had been cool, defiant, but he had realized his situation anxiously.

His eyes fell on the two dormer windows coming together, hinged at a sill almost on a level with the floor inside, the roof outside.

It was the one exit presented. A slant, steep, sharp, terribly dangerous, ran from the aperture.

"If beyond that I could gain a foothold after a roll," fluttered Clif, "I could run!"

A race among the house tops was better than a meek awaiting of the arrival of the human butcher, as at the shambles.

Clif decided on a fearful risk—only a person gymnasium-trained would have dared it.

He leaned against the sill and against the windows. The lightest brass snap in the world held them together.

The slight pressure of the windows opened them without a jar or creak, and the hustling, hissing wretch in the next room was not yet warned.

Clif poised and crossed the sill. It was the only way—now he was rolling.

He went eight feet, dropped four. But that the shingles were "bouncy," he would have been stunned.

Ten feet more on a new slant Clif headed. He was descending a series of terraces, and he saw his mistake.

For the roofs were all the same, and beyond the final one hovered space, the paving stones forty-five feet below.

On that smooth, slippery roof, rendered so by the action



of sun and rain until the surface of the shingles was pulped up into a mass of shiny slivers soft as silken strands, Clif could gain no foothold.

"Perdition!" was shrieked out from the dormer window as Clif dropped the third slant.

Clif had escaped being hammered to death, being slashed to death.

But—

"The last act!" he gulped.

He was rolling towards the precipitous edge that overhung the street front of the building.

"It's down now!" he breathed grimly.

A halt—a wrenching jolt—a quiver, and Clif hung.

That had happened which happens to lucky ones once in a hundred risks—sometimes to heroes sheer.

Clif's body striking the tin gutter, old, rusted, rotten, had torn it away.

The hooks that supported it, stout steel barbs, had bent, but had not given from their fastenings.

One chanced to hook the slight slack of the steel belt between inner wrist and side.

And there Clif hung.

He heard the shattered tin eaves jangle, strike a window, break it.

He heard them reach the street and clatter on the pavement.

Clif did not look down, though he might have done so.

A terrible picture aloft, fascinated, thrilled.

The Spaniard had found his weapons, and he had discovered Clif.

Two weapons, it seemed they were—two knives.

One between his horrible teeth, one used as a poise, a stay, Quesada had let himself down on the window sill.

His eyes shining like a serpent's, he was dropping the roofs, and his intention was unmistakable:

To reach the naval cadet ere any cry of alarm could summon aid, and send him spinning anew on his terrible downward journey, stabbed to the heart!



## CHAPTER X.

## UP ALOFT.

Below in the street there was a loud cry—some one seemingly had been struck by the falling spout.

Clif set up a shout—he could yell on occasion: he had indulged too often in “the navy hurrah,” the “academy warcry,” not to know how to.

It was not an outcry—just a burst of utterance purposely made shrill and piercing and—fetching.

“Aloft!” floated up a great hoarse cry.

“Fishcake!” fluttered Clif, “they’ve come!”

“Faraday!” rang next, a poignant, distracting gasp.

Clif hoped the murderous Spaniard heard. If he did he did not make the fact apparent.

He only increased his slipping, dropping rate of speed; he cautiously lowered over roofs that Clif had slid and bounced.

It was plain to see that he felt he had gone too far to stop now.

In the death of the uncompromising naval cadet who knew him and had run him down alone was there safety.

Clif felt that the turn of a second would settle his fate—and he loved life, although he could die like a hero, for he lived for others as well.

“My friends!” he gasped up at the approaching monster.

“Bid them good-bye!”

“They are in the street below!”

“The street is far!” jarring hissed the horrible wretch. “For them—near, for you!”

“They will come up—you will be caught!”

“I will end them, too!”

“Malignant monster!”

“Ha! ha! you would cross Quesada, would you?”

The last roof! Clif’s flesh began to creep



The Spaniard dug one knife almost hilt deep through the shingles and sheath board of the roof.

To it he clung and swayed, fingering the other sharp, shivering blade.

"Malediction!" he shrieked, uplifting it.

It fell, and following it came a red, spattering rain, and a report had preceded, and a ping! had brushed Clif Faraday's alert ear.

He tried to look—he did look.

Across the street, in range of the moonlit roof, Fishcake stood, a pistol leveled.

He had fired, had disarmed, had wounded the sanguinary Don with aim never so true as when upon its steadiness depended the life of a friend!

A frantic yell parted the Spaniard's lips. Gnashing his teeth he swung both hands to the knife that was his anchor.

It would not give, with force he had driven it, but he could not dislodge.

But he lowered himself—one foot went kicking out at Clif.

It grazed. The malignant wretch lowered again.

Crack!

He shriveled as a second bullet clipped his distorted face.

Crack—crack!

All of himself he thought now—it was Clif no longer.

Bullets were coming thick and hot.

In a frenzied way he took up the course he had descended—hopeless the task of retracing it, with no knife to clutch the way.

At the side the roofs squared. He saw his advantage, and arose to his feet.

Clif marveled at his daring, but it was not courage that nerved, but desperation.

A misstep and the fellow was lost—a topple and he would shoot like an arrow for the street.

He made the sliding, tumbling, wobbling run—his feet clamped on level surface.

Crack!

Again a fateful shot; Fishcake was shooting to hit. He



winged his man, for Quesada, with a scream, pressed one hand to the other arm.

He continued running, however, and Clif wondered what he hoped to gain.

He could not get out of Fishcake's range, for the level stretch of roof was narrow.

"He's done for!" breathed Clif.

Marvel-eyed, he watched the desperate desperado.

Quesada had run for the side edge—there was emptiness.

Fifteen feet across and ten down, however, was the roof of another building.

It was a dubious chasm, but the Spaniard tempted it  
Crash!

A thousand distracting jangles echoed on the air.

The Spaniard had landed on a skylight, went through it like a skater through thin ice, and took the top with him in ruins out of sight.

"His quietus!" soliloquized Clif, grimly.

Voices sounded directly below—nearer than the street, from which Fishcake seemed to have disappeared.

The tones of the Irishman and the German were mingled—and Fishcake's directing base.

"Hello, Clif!"

Down the roofs from the dormer windows floated a minor strain.

Brave little Nanny, one-eyed for the present, was paying out a rope.

It passed Clif, and then from the window below came a hail, rounding the eaves to the cadet at the other end of the line:

"All right—attack!"

The rope quivered, made taut. Clif's horrible hamper of steel was unbuckled.

"You know the rest!" said cool Fishcake, taking away his sustaining arm and leaving Clif to shift for himself.

"Come on!" shouted Clif, climbing through into the vacant room below at the end of the rope.

"Haven't had enough yet?" suggested Fishcake.

"Not while that Don is in sight!"



"He vos cutted to little pits chust yet awhile!" averred Bismarck, "in dot skyeslightses."

"No—ye can't kill a grayser widout hanging or burning him!" insisted the Irishman.

Clif put down the stairs, the others followed, not noticing that Nanny had not joined them till they were out in the street.

The next building was instantly visited. Here two families were in a vast commotion over the disturbing crash.

Clif tried to explain, and insisted on investigating.

The skylight shaft extended only one flight.

At the bottom was a mixed up debris, blood-stained, frightful, but through a window the Spaniard seemed to have escaped.

There was a scurrying scout, but no traces evolved.

"He's got away!" mourned Clif.

"Looks so!" muttered Fishcake, darkly.

"We'll go back to the room where I suppose Nanny is waiting," said Clif.

Fishcake explained how they had been directed to its location by the landlord's helper.

"Wait!" ordered Clif suddenly.

They were passing the building to which the man from the Maine had directed Clif's search for Quesada's "second room."

There was still a light there, but—he was an observant fellow, this navy-experienced, crack cadet of Fourth Class, Annapolis Naval Academy—it had been shifted from a table to a stand since he had first and last visited that apartment.

"Follow!" cried Clif instantly, spurring up with all kinds of hopeful conjectures.

Clif sped up the stairs. As he reached the top step he noticed that only the Irishman and the German were with him.

Some one was in the apartment, and he pressed ahead and entered, his two faithful acolytes right at his heels.

"H'm!" murmured Clif, pausing abruptly.

"Top of the day, mum!" said the Irishman, gallantly removing his frail apology for a hat.



"Good efening dis morning, aindt it!" smirked Bismarck, trying not to be outdone.

For the sole occupant of the room was a woman.

She was spare, scrawny and sixty, but she had the vitality of fair, fat and forty.

And she was mad. She had a big, green bulging umbrella in her hand, and, stationed in the middle of the room, she glared at the three intruders.

An upturned chair, a smashed looking glass hinted at some recent tantrum of rage.

"Excuse me, madame," said Clif, politely touching his cap.

"Yes, mum—ye see," began the talkative Celt, "we ware looking——"

"Shet up!" snapped the irate female, her eyes blazing fiercely, "you ape!"

"Ape! me an ape!" gasped the Irishman.

"Dot vos right—he looks like dose apeses!" chuckled Bismarck.

"See here!" spoke the woman in a high, scolding treble, picking out the German as the most important because the largest, and advancing toward him—which he smirkingly took as a mark of favor—"are you interested in this here room?"

"Mattam," bowed the obese German, "I am not eggactly dot proprietors, but I vill do dose honors."

"Oh! you will?" shrieked the extraordinary female, "then, you big, fat, good-for-nothing old loafer, you just tell me what you've done with Hiram!"

And without ado she lifted her umbrella, and smack! crash! it came down on the astonished head of the inoffensive Bismarck.



## CHAPTER XI.

## THE HEAD OF HIS CLASS.

"Do you hear me?" screamed the irate woman.

Bismarck staggered back, appalled.

"Oof! go 'vay!" he yelled, swinging out his arms wildly.

"Where's Hiram?" insisted the virago.

"I haffent got Hiram!"

"Search him!" gloated the jolly Irishman.

"Allow me a word," spoke Clif, interceding.

"Who be you?" snapped the woman, transferring her suspicious attention to Clif.

"Who is Hiram, may I ask?"

"My husband, of course!"

"Ah!"

"From Peeksboro, down country."

"I see."

"And he's sloped; and he's mortgaged the farm for two thousand dollars, and taken all his savings from the old yarn sock——"

"What for?" interrupted Clif.

"Gold bricks, I 'spect!" wailed the woman. "I found the letter he'd got from the varmint who is bamboozling him—a Spanish grandee, Fiddle-dee-dee!—and I came right up here, for Hiram was to meet him at a sittin room, in a sittin street, and this is the sittin place, and he hain't here, and the money's gone—I know it is—and his orphan children is paupers and I'm a lorn, lost widder—boo-hoo!"

"Irish, open the window!" hoarsely gasped Bismarck.

"Phwat for?"

"I wants to chump out—soon preddy quick, dot vomans vill get omprella-mat vonce more alretty!"



Clif understood. It was only too plain. Quesada, the firebug, the poisoner, was a swindler as well.

He had been working a scheme on a credulous old farmer, and here was the avenging Nemesis, arrived too late.

Clif tried to console her; advised her to accompany them to the police station.

He determined to report the entire matter, stopping for Nanny on the way, hoping Fishcake would be with him.

"Hey!" hailed Nanny, as they neared the entrance of the building where Clif had left him. "Why don't you leave a fellow?"

"Fishcake here?"

"No, but some one else is."

"You mean?"

"The man from the Maine!"

"What you talking about?" marveled Clif.

"What I say."

"Why——"

"I found him under the bed in that room upstairs."

Clif sprang up there, three steps at a time. He had not counted on this.

It was as Nanny had said, and the sailor greeted Clif eagerly.

Nanny had found him, tied and gagged, under the bed.

"Quesada?" interrogated the sailor.

Clif told him all there was to tell.

"Yes," nodded the sailor, "he has got away, and probably with the money from the husband of that poor woman."

"You know about that?"

"I suspect about that. My eyes are opening fast. I tell you, cadet! take me to the police station, too—stow me safe from Quesada. Then——"

"You will tell all?"

"I will tell all!"

There was not so much to tell, but it was exciting what there was of it.

The sailor had left the service—the war with Spain ended—crippled.



He had got to drinking, and people did not seem to care much for a veteran warrior of that kind.

He became bitter because he was not heroized, and Quesada, living by his wits, ran across him.

The Spaniard had got him under his control by administering a drug that enslaved the sailor.

The latter in a half-addled way comprehended that he was being used as a tool.

The letter the woman looking for Hiram had found gave an inkling of Quesada's scheme:

He would approach credulous country people, and his Spanish ways would carry weight.

Then he would show them the sailor—that impressive tattooing on his breast—and these simple people would think a hero of the navy could do nothing dishonest.

Quesada represented that he and the sailor knew where a dead Spanish grandee had buried a vast Cuban treasure.

They needed a partner to advance the expenses of unearthing this wealth.

"Hiram" had been roped in, it seemed, to the tune of over two thousand dollars.

The wife was taken to a hotel, and the sailor given a bunk at the station.

Then Clif and Nanny went to the academy.

Fishcake showed up just an hour later.

"Hello!" stared Nanny, noticing a long strip of sticking plaster across Fishcake's cheek, "fall down?"

"Fall down!" uttered Fishcake, testily, "well, I guess not!"

"What's the decoration, then?"

"Spanish machete."

"Huh!"

"Yes," nodded Fishcake, quite proudly. "When I left you, Clif, I saw a suspicious prowler."

"It was——"

"The Spaniard. He was toting a small trunk. This is one of its handles."

Fishcake produced from his pocket a piece of stout leather.

"Got that, did you?" murmured Nanny.



"Where he dropped it, for I had the other end. He gave me this lick. My gun went off and he went off. I could not get him, but he's carrying another bullet around with him."

"And the trunk?" questioned Clif.

"Commandant."

"You gave it to the academy superintendent?"

"With an explanation—some one at the door?"

It was a messenger from the commandant.

"Wants to see you, gentlemen," was the direction.

"All right," nodded Clif, and they trooped to the superintendent's office.

Clif stared a little at an empty trunk, and at its contents outspread on a table.

"I suppose I must not repress heroism with cadets who score your averages at drill and study," smiled the commandant. "In fact, gentlemen, you have done a very fine thing."

Fishcake braced up, glad of the machete clip; Nanny looked proud of his black eye.

"I have found some three thousand dollars in this trunk."

"The old farmer's money," decided Clif at once.

"And quite a lot of useless trumpery, and an outfit showing this Quesada to be an expert forger. Faraday," spoke the superintendent, presenting a folded paper, "can you explain the possession of that by the Spaniard, Quesada?"

Clif took a look—amazed.

"Why, sir!" he exclaimed, "this is my answer sheet to the last examination!"

"Where you failed to pass."

"Yes, sir!"

"What does it mean?"

Clif gave a start. He guessed.

"Let it go," he said, dropping his eyes.

"No, Faraday!" spoke up the commandant sternly. "I read your indecision. I found a note in among that stuff from an academy senior to Quesada."

Clif was silent, but he knew what was coming.

"Gage."



"Ah, sir!"

"He seems to have formed Quesada's acquaintance. And he seems to have used Quesada's skill to defeat you. Shall I tell you how?"

"I am afraid I guess!"

"And I know!" insisted the commandant, "for I have received a full confession from both Gage and his cousin. The cousin managed to steal your real answers."

"From the instructor?"

"Precisely. Gage hurried them to Quesada, who forged a faulty set. This was substituted, and you were marked on it."

"I wish, sir," said Clif, "you would not take any severe action."

"It is necessary. I cannot permit this kind of work. The culprits agree to a public confession and apology, if that satisfies you?"

"Too fully."

"And publicly you shall be placed where you belong—where this discovered document gives you the right to be."

They found Hiram, and returned the money; the next day.

The man from the Maine was placed in a sanitarium, with the promise of honesty when he recuperated.

The cadets made up quite a handsome purse for the heedless but well-meaning Irishman and German.

"I suppose you'll tramp to some new place now?" submitted Nanny.

"Be the foive kings of Galway! not fur a spell," mysteriously responded the Celt.

"Going to stay here?"

"We are. In the hopes——"

"Hopes of what?"

"That you cadets will wurruk up some new excitement—och! that Faraday! he's a broth of a boy, and that bracing!"

"Ve vould like to be cadots our mineselves!" observed Bismarck ardently.

"Everything fixed up in great trim, Clif!" said Fishcake. "If we'd only caught that Spaniard!"



"He'll run across his fate some day, never fear!" predicted Clif, with the strong mental reservation that he would keep his own personal eye wide open for him.

"Well," said Nanny, blinking his damaged optic, "we did some good!"

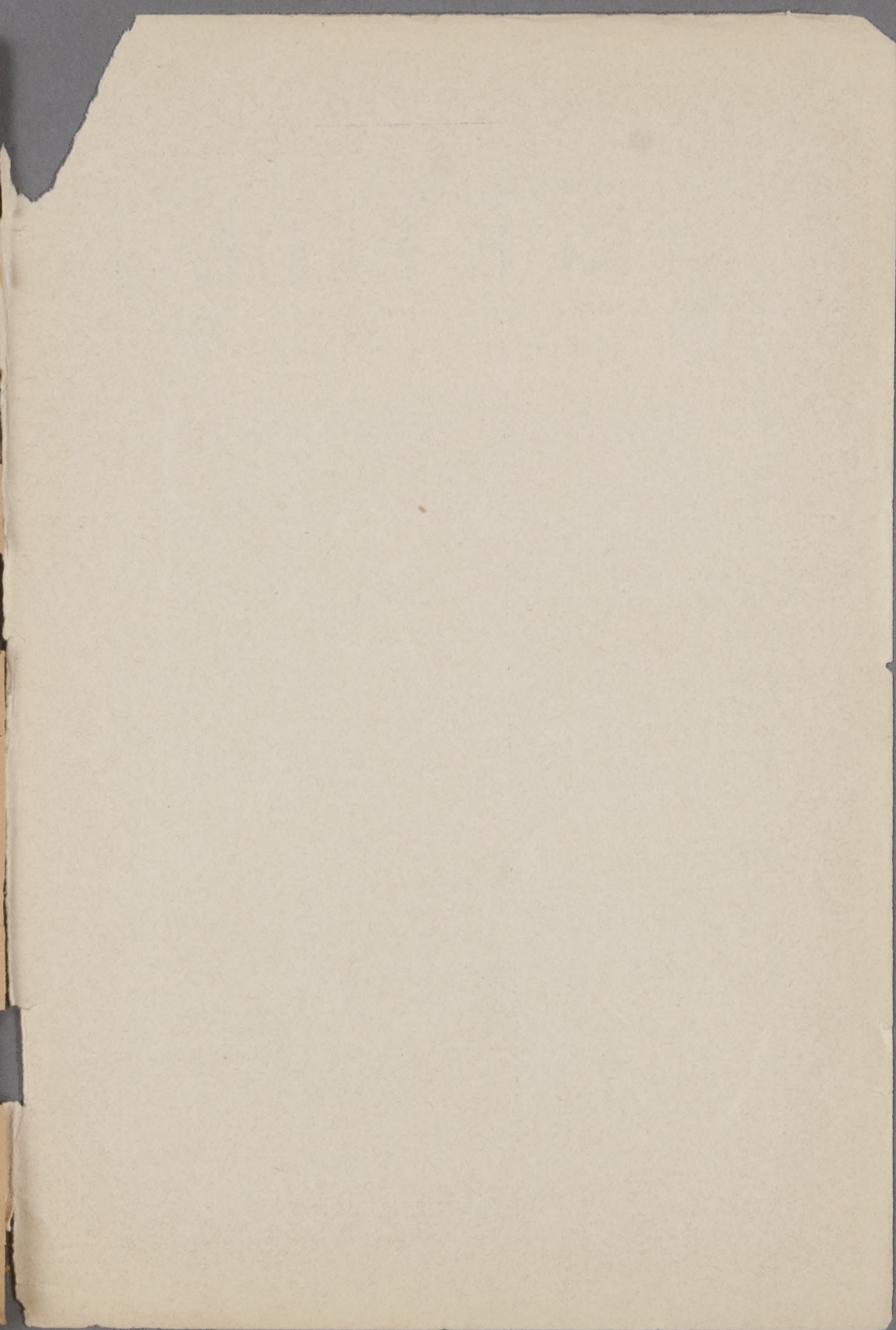
"If we did get battle scars!" nodded Fishcake, blandly rubbing his cheek.

"Yes," said Vic Rollins, "for you succeeded in putting Clif Faraday where he belongs—at the head of his class!"

(THE END.)

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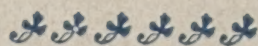
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